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Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence

The U.S. Military and
Counterinsurgency Doctrine,
1960–1970 and 2003–2006

Austin Long

Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited



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Preface

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is not a new challenge for the U.S. military, yet creating an appropriate and uniform organizational response continues to bedevil the services. Typically, generating a uniform organizational response is accomplished by the formulation of service or joint doctrine for a given type of conflict. Thus, the creation of new doctrine should be accompanied (perhaps after a lag) by an overall change in organizational behavior. This paper challenges this tight linkage between doctrine and behavior in the realm of COIN. By comparing COIN doctrine and operations in the 1960s to the more recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, it seeks to demonstrate that more-fundamental organizational changes (involving significant trade-offs) may be needed for the U.S. military to adapt to COIN both now and in the future. This research is part of a larger RAND effort to develop a roadmap for long-term investment in Department of Defense COIN capabilities.

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Summary

The publication of a new COIN doctrine manual in late 2006 was widely heralded as an indication that the U.S. military was finally coming to understand the problems it has recently faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. This interpretation assumes a tight linkage between doctrine as written and operations conducted. As one way to test this proposition, this paper compares modern COIN doctrine and operations with those of the 1960s.

In the 1960s, two periods of COIN doctrine can be observed. The first is 1960 to 1965, the period after John Kennedy was elected President but before U.S. combat troops were committed to Vietnam. The second is 1965 to 1970, the period of heaviest U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. In both cases, COIN doctrine as written by both the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps emphasized the role of the population (so-called hearts and minds), civil-military relations, small-unit operations, intelligence gathering, and related concepts. Yet operations seldom matched this written doctrine; instead, the military attempted to attrite the insurgency through large-scale operations and heavy reliance on firepower. In short, doctrine as written and operations conducted were not tightly linked.

As at least a partial explanation for this weak linkage, this paper posits a deeper set of organizational concepts and beliefs that has a much greater influence on operations than written doctrine. While a set of beliefs can often be helpful to organizations in conducting their preferred missions, it can be detrimental in other contexts. Much of the U.S. military prefers high-intensity warfare, a mission for which the organization is mentally and materially well prepared. However, mental preparation for this mission makes the military poorly suited to COIN.

Altering the set of beliefs oriented toward high-intensity warfare will require more than just new doctrine and some additional professional education. It will require significant reorientation of the services both mentally and materially. If correct, this paper casts doubt on the military's ability to truly be a "full-spectrum force," because attempting to optimize for the full spectrum of conflict may produce a force that is not particularly good at any one aspect of that spectrum.

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Abbreviations

ACC	area coordination center
AO	area of operations
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
CAP	Combined Action Platoon
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIGD	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CMAC	Civil-Military Advisory Committee
COIN	counterinsurgency
COMUSMACV	Commander, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary [later Rural] Development Support
DoD	Department of Defense
FB	firm base
FC	field circular
FID	foreign internal defense
FM	field manual
FMFM	Fleet Marine Force manual
FMI	field manual—interim
FMLN	Frente Faribundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional
GVN	Government of the Republic of Vietnam
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MCIP	Marine Corps Interim Publication
MCWP	Marine Corps Warfighting Publication
MNF-I	Multi-National Force—Iraq

NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PROVN	Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
RDF	Rapid Deployment Force
SUSREP	Senior U.S. Representative
SVN	South Vietnam
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures
VC	Viet Cong

Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence—The U.S. Military and Counterinsurgency Doctrine

Present U.S. military actions are inconsistent with that fundamental of counterinsurgency which establishes winning popular allegiance as the ultimate goal. While conceptually recognizing the total problem in our literature, Americans appear to draw back from its complexity in practice and gravitate toward a faulty premise for its resolution—military destruction¹

Many authors have noted the United States' massive and pervasive difficulty in conducting effective large-scale counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. The country's tendency to repeat the same mistakes during COIN has similarly generated a number of pithy analogies, with Bruce Hoffman's comparison of the United States to the protagonist of the movie *Groundhog Day* being the most common and most apt.² This paper seeks to address this repetition from a different angle by comparing the development of the U.S. military's doctrine for COIN in the 1960s with its development of a new COIN doctrine in the years after Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). In doing so, it serves two purposes.

First, it illustrates that doctrine as written in a variety of manuals is remarkably similar both within the two periods as well as across them. This will surprise those who believe that doctrine in the Vietnam era was somehow very different. But the fundamentals of COIN remain constant even as specific contexts and circumstances change, and those who wrote doctrine were aware of at least the outlines of these fundamentals.³

Second, this paper argues that, as the epigraph from the *Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam* (PROVN) report cited above observes, written doctrine has only a modest effect on the actual conduct of COIN operations. This second point is of critical importance, as it refutes both highly optimistic and highly critical interpretations of the U.S. military's relationship to COIN. Some optimists see the production of a new COIN doctrine as a moment of collective epiphany in the U.S. military. They believe that the U.S. military will embrace this new doctrinal approach with open arms, and rapidly adapt its opera-

¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN)*, March 1966, p. 53.

² Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-127-IPC/CMEPP, 2004, p. 1.

³ Some argue that the fundamentals of COIN have changed over time; others argue that the so-called fundamentals have never been proven. This paper assumes that both of these assertions are incorrect. For a more extensive argument against these points, see Austin Long, *On "Other" War: Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-482-OSD, 2006, pp. 13–20.

tions accordingly. Some critics, in contrast, find it appalling that the last manuals issued on COIN before OIF dated to the 1980s. Had a manual for COIN been issued more recently, they seem to imply, the conduct of operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan would have been quite different.

Both of these interpretations hinge on a tight linkage between words written in a manual and actions taken in the field. If this linkage is in fact not very tight, then both the optimistic and critical views lose much of their force. This paper concludes, in fact, that a military organization's structure, philosophy, and preferences (grouped under the general rubric of "organizational culture") have a much greater influence on the conduct of operations than written doctrine. It further argues that the culture of military organizations does more to shape doctrine than doctrine does to shape operations.

This argument is not new. During the last years of the Vietnam War, authors such as Robert Komer and Brian Jenkins were already discussing elements of this view.⁴ However, it deserves more-detailed examination in the context of current operations and doctrine. If correct, the argument has significant implications for current efforts to produce a military capable of full-spectrum operations, because some operations may simply never be well executed by forces structured in a certain way.

This paper first defines the terms "counterinsurgency" and "doctrine." Second, it presents a brief overview of the history of the two ground components of the U.S. military, the Army and Marine Corps, in relation to operations similar to COIN before 1960. Next, it presents selections from and analysis of COIN doctrine as presented in Army and Marine Corps manuals from 1960 to 1965 and 1965 to 1970. It then assesses how well these manuals corresponded to operations undertaken in those periods. Finally, it presents similar selections from and analysis of COIN doctrinal manuals from both services from 2003 to 2006, comparing these manuals with those of the earlier periods as well as to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Doctrine and Counterinsurgency: Defining the Terms

The U.S. military has brief and easily accessible definitions of both *doctrine* and *counterinsurgency*. Doctrine is defined as the "[f]undamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application."⁵ COIN is defined as "[t]hose military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."⁶ These definitions, though adequate, require some clarification.

Doctrine is more specific than just "fundamental principles," yet less specific than what are presently termed *tactics*, *techniques*, and *procedures* (TTP). Some fundamental principles, such as the need for clear chains of command, are general enough to apply to virtually any military activity. Doctrine, however, is about a specific subset of military activity, such as COIN

⁴ See Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-967-ARPA, 1972; and Brian Michael Jenkins, *The Unchangeable War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RM-6278-2-ARPA, 1970.

⁵ Joint Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, D.C., April 12, 2001, as amended through October 17, 2007, p. 168.

⁶ Joint Staff (2007), p. 128.

or combined-arms assault. TTP, in contrast, are about very specific activities, such as clearing a building or suppressing an enemy position with indirect fire.

COIN is also more than just a laundry list of possible actions intended to thwart insurgency. Instead, it should be viewed as a campaign that uses a variety of means to secure the population of a territory and restore (or create) the functions of government over that territory. At a minimum, these goals require (1) the government to possess a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and (2) the disruption or elimination of insurgent forces and infrastructure. Thus, COIN doctrine should provide a general guide to the conduct of a campaign that both (1) results in effective security and governance of a certain population and territory and (2) attacks the insurgency.

Small Wars Before COIN: U.S. Experiences Prior to 1960

COIN emerged as both a concept and a concern only in the aftermath of World War II. The collapse of empires and the emergence of nationalism and decolonization reduced or eliminated effective governance over large areas of the world. At the same time, small arms of unprecedented capability became increasingly available, often provided by either the U.S.-led Western bloc or the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. Combining these factors with advances in communications and transportation made insurgency and COIN qualitatively distinct from previous experiences. Yet the experience of creating or restoring governance was not in itself novel; both the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps had previous experience with operations of this sort.

The Army's central experiences occurred during the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and the Philippine War. In all three cases, the Army was successful, if often brutal. Beginning with Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, the Army showed a willingness to apply extreme coercion and violence to civilian populations to accomplish its goals.⁷ Equally importantly, the Army conducted both the Civil War and Indian Wars without having to coordinate with either civilians or foreign militaries. Only in the Philippines was there a civilian agency, and, despite its limited ambit, its presence provoked civil-military tension.⁸ Whatever lessons the Army drew from these experiences were not well codified in doctrine, and instead remained diffuse.

The Philippines is particularly interesting because it is in some ways the U.S. Army's most successful effort to restore governance in the face of guerilla opposition. The Army accomplished this goal with an often uneven but overall successful mix of force application and development. Initial Army policy under BG Arthur MacArthur, Jr., was very benevolent and only slightly repressive, and had little effect on the guerilla movement. This failure led to a division of opinion within the Army, with some advocating much harsher methods reminiscent of the Indian Wars and the Civil War. Others felt that more effort to secure the population should be made but that care should be taken to avoid excessive use of force. This latter view

⁷ See Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Towards Southern Civilians, 1861–1865*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Lance Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War 1860–1880," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 1, January 1995; and Andrew J. Birtle, "The U.S. Army's Pacification of Marinduque, Philippine Islands, April 1900–April 1901," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 61, No. 2, April 1997.

⁸ See Rowland T. Berthoff, "Taft and MacArthur, 1900–1901: A Study in Civil-Military Relations," *World Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, January 1953.

prevailed and became the basis of General MacArthur's successful pacification plan of 1900 and 1901. Following the replacement of General MacArthur with MG Adna Chaffee in 1901, however, the brutal methods advocated by some were put into practice in places like Samar and Luzon. This ugly but geographically limited violence resulted in courts martial for some officers but also destroyed the remaining guerilla elements.⁹

It is also worth noting that the Army in this period was still in its infancy as a professional organization. For example, it did not yet have a General Staff. Its mobilization for the Spanish-American War was haphazard; it had little control over the National Guard or informal units such as Roosevelt's Rough Riders.¹⁰ Though these deficiencies were corrected over the next two decades, these limitations in terms of conventional war may have paradoxically made adaptation to guerilla pacification easier. There were fewer "bad habits" for officers to unlearn, or those patterns of thought were at least less uniform throughout the officer corps.

Subsequent Army experience with the restoration of government took place in the aftermath of World War II. In Japan and Germany, the combination of devastation and formal surrender limited insurgency, and the United States deliberately chose (after some debate) to retain much of the civilian apparatus of the former governments. In both cases, this approach, combined with massive aid for reconstruction, was highly successful.¹¹

In contrast to the Army, the Marine Corps had more-frequent but smaller-scale experiences with the restoration of governance. From the 1880s through World War II, the Marine Corps was involved in numerous interventions, mostly in the Caribbean and Latin America. In particular, the Marine Corps was engaged in Nicaragua for over six years in the 1920s and 1930s. The Marines, though not afraid to use violence, never had sufficient force in these countries to use the types of coercive methods that the Army used. Furthermore, Marine Corps operations were almost always integrated with civilian agencies, particularly the State Department. (This earned the Marines the nickname "the State Department's troops.") The Marines also created or trained a variety of indigenous forces. Many of these experiences were codified in doctrine in the form of the *Small Wars Manual*, published in several editions through 1940.¹²

Neither the Army nor the Marine Corps was heavily involved in COIN between World War II and Vietnam. During the Eisenhower administrations, COIN was conducted primarily by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in some cases supported by U.S. Army Special Forces teams. The Korean War's guerilla elements operated as "adjuncts" to the conventional war rather than as a true insurgency. The U.S. military was also used during limited interven-

⁹ See John Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898–1902*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972; and Brian Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

¹⁰ See Jerry Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard: The Evolution of the American Militia, 1865–1920*, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, pp. 97–107; Phillip Semsch, "Elihu Root and the General Staff," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring 1963; and Graham Cosmas, "From Order to Chaos: The War Department, the National Guard, and Military Policy, 1898," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Autumn 1965.

¹¹ See James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel M. Swanger, and Anga R. Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1753-C, 2003, Chapters Two and Three, for a short overview.

¹² See Keith Bickel, *Mars Learning: The Marine Corps' Development of Small Wars Doctrine, 1915–1940*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001; and Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of U.S. Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama*, New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1990, for an overview.

tions in countries like Lebanon and the Dominican Republic, but these interventions were of very short duration and relatively bloodless.

The Kennedy Years: The Birth of COIN Doctrine

With the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, COIN became one of the foremost concerns of the U.S. government. President Kennedy believed that insurgencies aimed at undermining governments friendly to the United States were a major threat to national security. Within a year of taking office, he formed an interagency organization, the Special Group (Counterinsurgency), to study the problem. This group, which included the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of State, and the CIA, produced an overall COIN doctrine (also called “overseas internal defense”) that was embodied in National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 182 in August 1962.¹³

The ideas embodied in NSAM 182 provided the overarching framework within which early COIN doctrine was developed in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps.¹⁴ These ideas, influenced by prominent academics and think tanks like the RAND Corporation, focused on the central role of the population and its grievances against the government.¹⁵ In defining insurgency and the appropriate targets for countering it, NSAM 182 noted the following:

Insurgency is grounded in the allegiances and attitudes of the people. Its origins are domestic, and its support must remain so. The causes of insurgency therefore stem from the inadequacies of the local government to requite or remove popular or group dissatisfactions. . . . The U.S. must always keep in mind that *the ultimate and decisive target is the people*. Society itself is at war and the resources, motives and targets of the struggle are found almost wholly within the local population.¹⁶

A minor variation of this definition is used in the Army’s field manuals (FMs) from this period. FM 31-16, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (February 1963), uses the following definition: “The fundamental cause of a resistance movement is the real, imagined, or incited dissatisfaction of a portion of the population with prevailing political, social, or economic conditions.”¹⁷ The Army’s capstone manual, FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations-Operations* (February 1962), uses this variation: “The fundamental cause of large-scale irregular activities stems from the

¹³ The White House, National Security Action Memorandum No. 182, *Counterinsurgency Doctrine*, Washington, D.C., August 24, 1962.

¹⁴ For a more general overview of the evolution of U.S. Army COIN doctrine, see Richard Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998, esp. pp. 47–60; and Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 38–42.

¹⁵ For more detailed discussion of both the history and the theories of COIN, see Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; Long (2006); D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988; and Jefferson Marquis, “The Other Warriors: American Social Science and Nation Building in Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Winter 2000.

¹⁶ The White House (1962), pp. 6–8, emphasis in original.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 31-16, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, February 1963, p. 3.

dissatisfaction of some significant portion of the population . . . with the political, social, and economic conditions prevalent in the area.”¹⁸

The Marine Corps used a similar definition in its Fleet Marine Force manuals (FMFMs). FMFM-21, *Operations Against Guerilla Forces* (August 1962), uses the following terms:

Resistance stems from the dissatisfaction of some part of the population. The dissatisfaction may be real, imagined, or incited and is usually centered around a desire for—

- (1) Political change.
- (2) Relief from actual or alleged repression.
- (3) Elimination of foreign occupation or exploitation.
- (4) Economic and social improvement.
- (5) Religious expression.¹⁹

At least rhetorically, the U.S. government had reached agreement about the root causes of insurgency and the appropriate targets of COIN.

Early Doctrinal Views on COIN Organization and Operations

The U.S. government was in similar agreement about how COIN operations should be organized and conducted. NSAM 182 noted the following:

In insurgency situations indigenous military action will be required. U.S. operational assistance may be a necessary adjunct to the local effort. In these situations, U.S. programs should be designed to make the indigenous military response as rapid and incisive as possible while parallel reforms are directed at ameliorating the conditions contributing to the insurgent outbreak. . . . Anticipating, preventing, and defeating communist-directed insurgency requires a blend of civil and military capabilities and actions to which each U.S. agency at the Country Team level must contribute.²⁰

This model of COIN became known as the “hearts and minds” approach after Sir Gerald Templer’s remarks about the British experience during the Malayan insurgency. Reform and good governance combined with judicious police and military action were the essence of this approach. Close coordination between military, police, and civil authority was a prerequisite for success.

The U.S. Army’s doctrine generally accepted this vision, though with a slightly harsher tone. For example, the importance of a reform program is noted in FM 100-5:

Irregular forces lose effectiveness when not supported by the civil population, whether such support is provided willingly or gained through coercion. . . . The irregular force is usually a result and not the cause of the problem. The destruction of an existing irregular force

¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 1962, p. 137.

¹⁹ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21, *Operations Against Guerilla Forces*, August 1962, pp. 2–3.

²⁰ The White House (1962), pp. 12–13.

normally does not provide a complete solution. The population must be convinced that the conduct or support of irregular activities will not only fail to gain the desired results, but may result in the imposition of sanctions and actually delay the elimination of the causes of discontent. Irregular forces accompany their operations with extensive propaganda designed to gain support of the local population. As a countermeasure, the local government being supported by the U.S., as well as U.S. forces, must present a concrete program which will win popular support.²¹

Similarly, FM 31-16 devotes an entire chapter to police operations and population control and includes a recommendation to establish “pacification committees” at the brigade and battalion levels. These committees were to include representatives from the military, paramilitaries, and civilian agencies.²²

In FMFM-21 the Marine Corps also noted the importance of close coordination with both other U.S. agencies and the host nation, particularly local police and judicial authorities.²³ Like the Army manuals, it devotes considerable attention to the population, noting that

[c]ommanders must realize that operations against guerillas will seldom solve the problems of the area in which they occur. The guerilla force is only a symptom of the overall problem which caused the resistance movement to arise in the first place. Throughout military operations, a positive program of civil assistance must be conducted to eliminate the original cause of the resistance movement.²⁴

Doctrine at the time also emphasized the importance of decentralized operations for COIN:

Combat actions against guerilla forces are extremely decentralized until sizeable guerilla elements have been located. Even then, operations are centralized only to the degree necessary to effect the destruction of the located enemy force. A continuous distribution of force in depth is necessary.²⁵

FM 31-16 also emphasizes small-unit patrolling and reconnaissance as well as ambush. It further notes that police and population-control operations must often take place concurrently with combat operations.²⁶ FMFM-21 also points to the need for patrolling and reconnaissance.²⁷

²¹ U.S. Department of the Army (1962), FM 100-5, pp. 139–140.

²² U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 38. All of Chapter Four of the manual is dedicated to police operations and population control.

²³ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), pp. 13–16.

²⁴ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), p. 72. All of FMFM-21’s Chapter Ten and Appendix B are devoted to population considerations and population control.

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 49.

²⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), pp. 4–60.

²⁷ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), pp. 33–34.

Early Doctrinal Views on Intelligence and COIN

These early editions of FM 31-16 and FMFM-21 use nearly identical language to describe the importance of intelligence to COIN. Both describe attempts to conduct operations against insurgents without sound intelligence as a waste of “time, material, and troop effort.”²⁸ FM 31-16 also comments on the breadth of knowledge of nonmilitary factors needed for COIN:

A basic essential in any type of counterinsurgency intelligence operation is a thorough understanding of the target area and society, in all its aspects, augmented by a complete understanding of the prevailing internal and external forces supporting or subverting the society. . . . The basic inventory of intelligence on a specific area and situation is derived from the areas and country studies supplemented with situational intelligence collected more recently on the scene.²⁹

In addition to mentioning the importance of indigenous personnel, and providing a warning about them, FM 100-5 notes the importance of social and cultural knowledge during COIN:

The nature of intelligence operations described above requires a knowledge of local customs, languages, cultural background and personalities not attainable by U.S. personnel in the time allowed. As a result, local police, security and government organizations must be exploited to the maximum extent possible. Liaison personnel, interpreters, guides, trackers and clandestine agents are normally required. The loyalty and trustworthiness of these personnel must be firmly established. Frequently, these personnel cooperate with both opposing forces in an effort to achieve maximum personal gains.³⁰

Finally, FMFM-21 states that every Marine must be an intelligence collection asset and that small-unit actions must be based on this intelligence:

Every Marine must have an understanding of the basic techniques and value of intelligence and counterintelligence in counterinsurgency operations. This is necessary because of both his own immediate requirements in many situations and because of the requirements of higher headquarters. Each man must be observant and alert to everything he sees and hears. He reports anything unusual concerning the civil population and the guerilla force, no matter how trivial. Counterinsurgency operations feature many small unit operations, and commanders must be prepared to process, evaluate and act promptly on the observations made by members of his unit.³¹

FM 31-16 makes a similar point about the importance of individual soldiers reporting their observations as intelligence.³²

²⁸ This phrase is found in U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), p. 17; and U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 92. U.S. Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (1962), pp. 147–148, also discusses the importance of intelligence for COIN.

²⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 92.

³⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (1962), p. 147.

³¹ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), p. 17.

³² U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 95.

Both FMFM-21 and FM 31-16 comment on the need to coordinate intelligence among the military, police, paramilitary, and civilian agencies of both the United States and the host nation. They also note the need to go beyond traditional military methods of obtaining intelligence, recommending extensive use of clandestine informer networks. In particular, both manuals stress the importance of surrendered and captured enemy personnel as sources of intelligence.³³ FM 31-16 emphasizes this point: “Prisoners of war are taken whenever possible. Every opportunity is given the enemy to surrender, except when the success of combat operations depends on surprise.”³⁴

Limits of Doctrine: Vietnam, 1961 to 1963

Doctrine as it appeared in print was thus broadly accepted by both the civilian and military communities from 1961 to 1965. Yet at the same time, public comments by some senior officers betrayed a hesitance to fully embrace the implications of written doctrine. Appearing to dismiss the differences between conventional war and COIN, Army Chief of Staff GEN George Decker notably stated, “Any good soldier can handle guerillas.” His successor, GEN Earle Wheeler, argued, “It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military.”³⁵

It was in Vietnam that the differences between written doctrine and actual practice became glaringly apparent. First and foremost, the principle of unity of effort between civil and military elements of the U.S. COIN effort enshrined in written doctrine was not upheld. The 1962 terms of reference for the creation of the position of Commander, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV), clearly indicate that although COMUSMACV was nominally subordinate to the Ambassador, he was in fact autonomous:

The U.S. Ambassador, who as representative of the President is the senior U.S. representative in Viet-Nam, will be kept apprised by the Senior U.S. military commander, in advance, of plans in the military field, in order to assure proper coordination of U.S. activities. . . . In case of differences of view, any member of the Task Force would be free to communicate such differences to Washington for decision in accordance with already-existing procedures. While the Ambassador and the senior military commander will keep each other . . . fully informed on all high-level contacts with the GVN [Government of the Republic of Vietnam] and on major political and military plans, the operational command of U.S. military personnel will be the direct responsibility of the senior U.S. military commander.³⁶

³³ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM-21 (1962), pp. 22–24; and U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), pp. 95–98.

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 31-16 (1963), p. 96.

³⁵ General Decker was Army Chief of Staff from 1960 to 1962, General Wheeler from 1962 to 1964. Both are quoted in Krepinevich (1986), p. 37.

³⁶ Maxwell Taylor, “Terms of Reference for the Senior United States Military Commander in Vietnam,” Memorandum for Secretary of Defense McNamara, January 12, 1962, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Volume II, *Vietnam, 1962*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, n.d. This wording differs slightly from the terms approved at the January 3, 1962, Palm Beach conference. However, it is clear in the orders establishing COMUSMACV in February that Taylor’s was the view that prevailed. See U.S. Department of State (n.d.), documents 9, 18, and 53.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff would not tolerate the subordination of a four-star general to an ambassador, doctrine or no doctrine. Ambassador to Vietnam Frederick Nolting complained about this command relationship at some length, to no avail.³⁷

Other deviations from written doctrine occurred in Vietnam during this period. For instance, many observers felt that the training of South Vietnamese forces was more appropriate to conventional conflict than COIN. President Kennedy's military adviser GEN Maxwell Taylor, after visiting Vietnam in late 1961, reported the following: "It is our clear impression . . . that, by and large, training and equipment of the Vietnamese armed forces are still too heavily weighted toward conventional military operations."³⁸ Roger Hilsman, director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, came to similar conclusions after visiting in early 1963, further pointing out that this weighting resulted in part from American advice and support:

You have also the impression that the military is still too heavily oriented towards sweep-type operations. There is still the same emphasis on air power as there was before. Almost every operation so far as I can tell still begins with an air strike which inevitably kills innocent people and warns the Viet Cong that they should get moving for the troops will be coming soon. I think . . . that the Americans are as much to blame for this as the Vietnamese.³⁹

Many observers have since noted both this emphasis on conventional rather than COIN operations on the part of many (though not all) U.S. advisory personnel as well as the military's overall preoccupation with a conventional invasion from North Vietnam.⁴⁰

Attempts to Put Doctrine into Practice: The PROVN Study, 1965 to 1966

From 1963 to 1965, the situation in South Vietnam went from bad to worse. Coup followed coup in Saigon, while the Viet Cong (VC) grew stronger throughout the countryside. The complete collapse of South Vietnam seemed imminent despite increasing U.S. efforts.

GEN Harold Johnson, who became Army Chief of Staff in 1964, was one of many deeply troubled by U.S. COIN efforts in Vietnam. Upon returning from Vietnam in March 1965, General Johnson directed a select group of officers to undertake a reappraisal of efforts in Vietnam. This study was completed and issued in March 1966 as *A Program for the Pacification and Long Term Development of South Vietnam* (universally known as "PROVN").

PROVN was a lengthy and thoughtful study, but provided few (if any) truly new ideas. As previously mentioned, PROVN noted that U.S. COIN doctrine already contained the

³⁷ U.S. Department of State (n.d.), documents 19, 25, 36, 40, and 52.

³⁸ Maxwell Taylor, "Letter to President Kennedy," November 3, 1961, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Volume I, *Vietnam, 1961*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988.

³⁹ Roger Hilsman, "Memorandum for the Record," Saigon, January 2, 1963, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Volume III, *Vietnam, January–August 1963*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991.

⁴⁰ See, *inter alia*, Krepinevich (1986), pp. 56–66; U.S. Department of the Army (1966), p. 102; and Chester L. Cooper, Judith E. Corson, Laurence J. Legere, David E. Lockwood, and Donald M. Weller, *The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam*, Volume 1, *An Overview of Pacification*, Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analysis, 1972, pp. 13–14.

tenets essential to success. However, these tenets had not been fully or well implemented in practice. PROVN sought to provide a blueprint for the operationalization of COIN doctrine.

First and most importantly, PROVN reiterated the doctrinal point that development and good governance should be central to all U.S. efforts:

A viable, noncommunist government in SVN [South Vietnam] is fundamental to the achievement of U.S. objectives. Failure to develop such a public supported political order not only will preclude winning a true military victory, it will ensure losing a negotiated peace . . . Long-standing and legitimate causes of insurgency are still present. Promises of reform melt into maintenance of the *status quo*.⁴¹

PROVN readily acknowledged that development required security, but pointed out that security was meant to enable development rather than be an end in itself.

PROVN also called for a “single manager” for Vietnam who would be responsible for all aspects of U.S. activity there, and further argued that this should be (at least initially) the U.S. Ambassador. In addition, PROVN stated the following:

To succeed, we must actually decentralize and delegate to Americans and Vietnamese at district and province levels the requisite resources and authority to accomplish the tasks at hand. Their exercise of this authority must be buttressed and sustained up through the chain of command. . . . Unity of command and effort is required now at province level, with the province chief directing all GVN activities (military and nonmilitary) in the province. His counterpart, the SUSREP (Senior U.S. Representative), must direct all U.S. activities . . .⁴²

This was a directive for actually implementing FM 31-16’s recommendation to establish “pacification committees” and NSAM 182’s call for unity of civil and military effort.

PROVN additionally stressed the importance of language training and knowledge of political and social factors. It repeatedly noted that wide variations between the situations in different provinces and even between different districts in the same province were to be expected. This variation would require detailed awareness of the specific local environment where those conducting COIN were assigned.⁴³

Despite being an honest attempt to implement the doctrine that the U.S. government and the military services had promulgated, PROVN did not receive a warm welcome from much of the military. The officer who was nominally in charge of the study, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations LTG Vernon Mock, refused to sign off on it for distribution, saying to the authors, “Why don’t you come in early some morning and have one of the cleaning ladies sign it?” PROVN did not receive much more of a welcome from either the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the COMUSMACV, GEN William Westmoreland. Others, such as Marine Corps LtGen. Victor Krulak, found it to be highly useful, as did civilians such as Ambassador Robert Komer.⁴⁴ Yet the net effect of the PROVN study on the military conduct of COIN in Vietnam

⁴¹ U.S. Department of the Army (1966), pp. 76–77, emphasis in the original.

⁴² U.S. Department of the Army (1966), pp. 61, 66.

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Army (1966), pp. 2-47–2-50.

⁴⁴ For the history of PROVN and reactions to it, see William Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995, Part Four, pp. 201–212; and

was minimal for the next several years. Instead, as detailed below, the U.S. military did almost exactly the opposite of what the report recommended.

COIN as Practiced: Vietnam, 1965 to 1968

The introduction of U.S. ground forces in a combat (rather than advisory) role in Vietnam in March 1965 began a rapid cascade of U.S. involvement in the war. Most significantly for COIN operations, it meant that the COMUSMACV, General Westmoreland, at last had combat troops to command rather than to merely advise. He quickly began employing them in operations, but these operations were not grounded in COIN doctrine as promulgated.

The essence of operations from 1965 to 1968 was to apply maximum firepower to enemy “main-force” units in order to destroy them. By destroying enemy forces faster than they could be replaced, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) sought to bring the war to a favorable conclusion via attrition. To this end, U.S. forces sought contact with large units and then destroyed them, an approach known as “search and destroy.”

This approach was premised on the idea of the massive application of firepower. General Westmoreland provided a one-word summary of his antiguerilla strategy: “Firepower.”⁴⁵ In a less terse summary, General Westmoreland stated that if the enemy did not quit, the U.S. forces would “just go on bleeding them to the point of national disaster for generations.”⁴⁶ General Westmoreland’s operations officer, BG (later LTG) William Depuy, summarized the MACV strategy in a statement to the press: “We are going to stomp them to death.”⁴⁷ After being promoted to major general and receiving command of the 1st Infantry Division, General Depuy described the approach in more detail to Daniel Ellsberg: “The solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm . . . till the other side cracks and gives up.”⁴⁸

MACV’s actions more than lived up to this rhetoric. Over 4 million tons of indirect (air and artillery) ordnance was expended over South Vietnam from 1965 to 1973.⁴⁹ Artillery forces alone expended more than 20 million rounds total of all calibers.⁵⁰ Much of this firepower was not even employed in direct support of troops, instead being fired in so-called harassment and interdiction missions. This meant firing unobserved into areas thought likely to contain the enemy.⁵¹ Vast amounts of direct-fire ordnance were used as well.

In addition to using large quantities of firepower, the military spent considerable effort on improving the quality of firepower. It developed new doctrinal guidelines for the employment

Lewis Sorley, “To Change a War: General Harold K. Johnson and the PROVN Study,” *Parameters*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring 1998. The author thanks GEN (ret.) Volney Warner, one of PROVN’s authors, for his additional comments on the history of PROVN.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Krepinevich (1986), p. 197.

⁴⁶ Quoted in James P. Harrison, *The Endless War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 256.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, New York: Random House, 1988, p. 501.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Sheehan (1988), p. 619.

⁴⁹ Harrison (1989), p. 256.

⁵⁰ Robert Scales, *Firepower in Limited War*, Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1994, p. 84.

⁵¹ Scales (1994), p. 141.

of firepower and introduced new technology, such as digital fire-control computers for artillery.⁵² Fixed-wing gunships were developed from cargo aircraft, while a panoply of lethal aerial munitions were employed.⁵³ Strategic Air Command B-52s intended for nuclear delivery were pressed into service as massive, all-weather conventional bombers.⁵⁴

Along with firepower, the Army sought to utilize superior mobility in the form of helicopters to outmaneuver the enemy. Units dispatched in helicopters from central bases spent a few hours or days “in the bush” (often quite far away from major population centers) and then returned to base. This was hardly consonant with COIN doctrine, which required significant interaction with the population, both to provide security and to gather intelligence. However, given that the original goal of airmobility was to provide the ability to rapidly disperse and concentrate against armored forces on the potentially nuclear battlefields of Europe, the inapplicability of this tactic to COIN is not surprising. In fact, it was just another example of the feeling, common among many in the Army, that COIN was a lesser included case of war. One of the pioneers of airmobility noted the following after the end of the war:

A briefing of particular significance took place in the late afternoon of 12 December 1960. . . . At that time the focus in the Army was on the nuclear battlefield. Organic aviation was viewed by the Army as the best means of maintaining combat operations in an area characterized by great depth and frontage with the dispersion of many small self-contained units. The major threat was viewed as a sophisticated enemy attacking with masses of armor on the plains of Europe. Counter-guerrilla warfare at that time was viewed as a secondary mission. Nevertheless, the early planners in airmobility perceived that one of the automatic fallouts in organizing the Army for greater airmobility would be much greater capabilities in the lower spectrums of warfare.⁵⁵

Instead of automatically making the Army more capable of COIN, airmobility actually undercut written doctrine by disconnecting troops from the population.

In addition to emphasizing fire and maneuver over pacification, combat forces in Vietnam were also oriented toward centralized, large-unit operations rather than decentralized pacification and patrolling. Beginning with the 1st Cavalry Division’s battle in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965, Army units were consistently employed in multibattalion operations.⁵⁶ Operations increased in size, as Operation Attleboro in September 1966 illustrated. Begun as a search and destroy operation by battalions of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Attleboro grew to include over 22,000 U.S. and allied troops, including General Depuy’s 1st

⁵² Boyd Dastrup, *King of Battle: A Branch History of the U.S. Army’s Field Artillery*, Fort Monroe, Va.: Office of the Command Historian, Training and Doctrine Command, 1992, pp. 282–287.

⁵³ See Jack Ballard, *Development and Employment of Fixed Wing Gunships, 1962–1972*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Air Force Historian, 1982.

⁵⁴ See Bernard Cole, “A Noglow in Vietnam, 1968: Airpower in the Battle of Khe Sanh,” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 64, No. 1, January 2000, pp. 149–150.

⁵⁵ John Tolson, *Airmobility in Vietnam 1961–1971*, Washington, D.C.: Army Center for Military History, 1973, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Krepinevich (1986), pp. 168–169; and Russell W. Glenn, *Reading Athena’s Dance Card: Men Against Fire in Vietnam*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000, pp. 10–11. For a more detailed account of the Ia Drang battles, see Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once . . . and Young: Ia Drang, the Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam*, New York: Random House, 1992.

Infantry Division.⁵⁷ Attleboro was followed in 1967 with the even larger Cedar Falls–Junction City operations. Both were multidivisional operations with massive fire support, with Junction City utilizing over 25,000 U.S. and allied forces.⁵⁸

In contrast to the exhortations of written doctrine, MACV also significantly slighted pacification and encouraged aggressive, large-unit sweeps with high volumes of firepower. This is apparent in the metrics for unit performance and officer evaluation chosen by MACV. The most infamous is the “body count,” the counting of enemy dead. Far from encouraging the military to provide security to Vietnamese civilians, the body count often meant that Vietnamese were simply designated enemies if they were killed.

Jeffrey Record, who was in Vietnam as a civilian, concluded that the body count became such an important metric for success that it corrupted much of the war effort: “[A]massing kills became the standard of career success for U.S. commanders, and therefore an often irresistible temptation to abuse in both the infliction and reporting of enemy casualties.”⁵⁹

Another metric that encouraged search and destroy over pacification was “battalion days in the field.” This metric made the number of days each battalion spent conducting combat operations a measure of performance. While time spent in search and destroy counted in this metric, pacification missions did not.⁶⁰ Other measures intended to ensure aggressive action against main-force units included number of combat sorties flown, bomb tonnage dropped, ammunition expended, and ratio of U.S. deaths to enemy deaths.⁶¹

Not all U.S. military COIN operations adhered to the approach described above. Two programs in particular were notable for how well they tried to follow written COIN doctrine. The first was the CIA and Army Special Forces–led Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program, which sought to help ethnic minorities in the central highlands by both training self-defense forces and providing some development assistance.⁶² The second was the Marine Corps–led Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program, which combined a Marine squad with a paramilitary Popular Forces platoon to provide security at the village and hamlet levels.⁶³ Despite being consonant with doctrine, both the Special Forces and the Marines experienced intense pressure to conform to the MACV model.

CAP has been and remains the subject of much attention and debate. Some argue that the program was not terribly successful given its small scale, lack of sufficient troops to protect all hamlets, and the fact that such dispersed U.S. forces were vulnerable to being overrun by large enemy units. Others see CAP as a road to victory because CAPs provided local security

⁵⁷ Bernard Rogers, *Cedar Falls–Junction City: A Turning Point*, Vietnam Studies Series, Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1974, pp. 8–12.

⁵⁸ Rogers (1974), pp. 16–24, 83–90; and Bernard C. Nalty, ed., *The Vietnam War: The History of America's Conflict in Southeast Asia*, London: Salamander Books, 1998, pp. 172–175.

⁵⁹ Hilsman (1963), in U.S. Department of State (1991), p. 84.

⁶⁰ Sheehan (1988), p. 636; Jack Shulimson and Charles Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and Buildup 1965*, Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978, pp. 115–116.

⁶¹ Sheehan (1988), pp. 287–288; Krepinevich (1986), pp. 196–205.

⁶² See Francis Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961–1971*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1973, pp. 19–44; and Thomas Aherm, *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam*, Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2001, Chapters Three and Five and pp. 179–182.

⁶³ See Francis West, *The Village*, New York: Harper Row, 1972; and William Corson, *The Betrayal*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1968, pp. 174–198. In addition to platoons, Combined Action Companies were formed.

and invited attack from mass insurgent groups, thereby making these groups more vulnerable to firepower.⁶⁴ There is some merit to both points of view (though this author leans more to the latter), but the important point is not whether CAP was a model for success or not. Instead, it is important to note that CAP was supported by existing doctrine for COIN in a way that harassing and interdiction fire and search and destroy missions were not. Yet, it was search and destroy that dominated.

Finally, civil-military integration was not well developed in this period. Not until 1967 was a real organization established to manage all civilian efforts and to attempt to integrate them with military efforts. This organization, Civil Operations and Revolutionary [later Rural] Development Support (CORDS), was headed by Robert Komer, who was acting as a deputy to the COMUSMACV. Although CORDS represented a step forward in integration, Ambassador Komer still had limited ability to influence how U.S. forces were employed. This was clearly not the arrangement advocated in doctrine and articulated in PROVN.

Doctrines in the Late 1960s

By March 1967, U.S. combat forces had been engaged in Vietnam for two years. New doctrine manuals began to appear in this period and, as one might expect, they demonstrated some signs of evolution. For instance, the new manuals were longer. The March 1967 version of FM 31-16 was about 25 percent longer than the February 1963 version; the December 1967 version of FMFM-21 (redesignated FMFM 8-2, *Counterinsurgency Operations*) was about 50 percent longer than the August 1962 version. Some shifts in terminology were also visible; FM 31-16 used the term “internal defense and development” rather than “counterinsurgency.” This shift is also evident in the September 1968 version of FM 100-5:

The term “counterinsurgency” is used by the joint services, other governmental agencies, and many foreign countries. Within the U.S. Army, depending on the context, use of “stability operations” or “internal defense and internal development” is preferred to “counterinsurgency.”⁶⁵

Yet despite these cosmetic differences, the doctrine produced in this period was fundamentally similar to earlier doctrine. For example, the 1967 version of FM 31-16 notes the primary importance of the population and the need for civil-military integration:

Since the essence of the counterinsurgency campaign is to win back the support of the people for the established government, the importance of civil affairs is paramount . . . [I]n internal defense operations, because of the importance of isolating the guerrillas from the people, civil affairs becomes one of the primary missions of the counterinsurgency force. This is because all internal defense operations plans must be based on an integrated civil-military

⁶⁴ Krepinevich (1986), pp. 172–175, presents a short version of arguments for and against CAP; for more detail see Michael Petersen, *The Combined Action Platoons: The Marines' Other War in Vietnam*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1989. Petersen, a former CAP Marine himself, concludes that a larger CAP program would have been less destructive but perhaps no more successful than the alternative.

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 1968, p. 13-1.

approach designed to progressively reassert host government control and gain the trust, confidence, and active cooperation of the people.⁶⁶

Similarly, the 1968 version of FM 100-5 describes the roots of insurgency much as earlier versions did: “Government ultimately depends on the acquiescence if not the active support of its citizens. . . . Thus, the basic causes of insurgency are the existence of one or more grievances and lack of faith in the government’s ability or desire to correct them.”⁶⁷ The root causes of insurgency as described in FMFM 8-2 are identical to those presented in FMFM-21.⁶⁸

In terms of organization for COIN, the 1967 version of FM 31-16 reiterates the call for the establishment of pacification committees, though they are renamed “area coordination centers” (ACCs). This later version provides more detail on these pacification committees than the earlier version, and specifically calls for the establishment of ACCs at all levels of political organization, especially the province, district, and village levels. The membership of the ACC is also enumerated, with the military, intelligence agencies, paramilitary, and police being the foremost members. FM 31-16 also calls for Civil-Military Advisory Committees (CMACs) to be established to advise the ACC, with members including judges, religious leaders, labor unions, and other respected members of the community.⁶⁹

In terms of operations, the revised doctrines of the late 1960s were similar to their predecessors, although they frequently elaborated on earlier versions. FMFM 8-2 (December 1967), for example, devoted an entire chapter to the conduct of small-unit actions, noting the following:

Operations against guerillas are characterized by small unit actions. They are conducted by numerous squads, platoons, and companies operating continually throughout the guerilla area The authority to conduct patrols is decentralized as much as practicable. Although overall patrolling policy and certain special patrols may be determined by higher headquarters, the extensive patrol activity and need for rapid response makes it desirable to assign patrol authority to lower echelons. Battalions, companies, or platoons may be assigned patrol authority. Flexibility is the prime consideration.⁷⁰

The 1967 version of FM 31-16 also reasserted the importance of the population and provided a caution about the use of firepower:

Military operations must take into account protection of the civilian population. This is a problem in counterguerilla operations because the guerilla usually hides himself in the civilian population and fights from that base of support. Bringing artillery or airpower to bear on a town from which sniper fire was received may neutralize the guerilla action, but it will almost certainly alienate the civilian population as a result of casualties among noncombatants.⁷¹

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of the Army (1967), FM 31-16, p. 7-8.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of the Army (1968), FM 100-5, p. 13-2.

⁶⁸ U.S. Marine Corps, FMFM 8-2, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, December 1967, p. 3.

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of the Army (1967), FM 31-16, p. 32-33.

⁷⁰ U.S. Marine Corps (1967), FMFM 8-2, pp. 72-74.

⁷¹ U.S. Department of the Army (1967), FM 31-16, p. 36.

The 1967 version of FM 31-16 also devotes sections to the importance of consolidation operations (also known as “clear-and-hold operations”) as well as civil affairs.⁷²

Doctrine in this later period continued to emphasize the critical importance of intelligence for COIN. Cultural, political, and economic intelligence was still seen as important alongside traditional order of battle. In addition, FMFM 8-2 and FM 100-5 both stated that the need for and staffing requirements of intelligence in COIN were more intense than the needs of normal operations.⁷³

Besides the formal and general doctrine produced by the services, MACV also began to produce its own COIN doctrine specific to the conflict in Vietnam. One example is the *Handbook for Military Support of Pacification* (February 1968). This guide provided descriptions of pacification and of the military’s role in supporting pacification, as well as numerous specific TTP for COIN. The handbook’s introduction provides perhaps as clear and succinct a definition of COIN as can be found:

Pacification, as it applies in the Republic of Vietnam [,] is the military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy’s underground government, the assertion or reassertion of political control and involvement of the people in the government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion. . . . The key to pacification is the provision of sustained territorial security. Territorial security is security from VC local forces and guerilla units and VC/NVA [North Vietnamese Army] main force units, if any are in or threatening the area. It also includes the protection of the people within a hamlet from the VC infrastructure and bullies.⁷⁴

The handbook also provides guidance on how many of the other elements of COIN doctrine relate to the specific environment of Vietnam.

COIN as Practiced: Vietnam, 1969 to 1972

The Tet Offensive of 1968 finally provided General Westmoreland with a chance to effectively apply the firepower he had amassed in Vietnam. The results were devastating to the VC, but the mere fact that the VC could launch such a major effort after almost three years of search and destroy was equally devastating to General Westmoreland. He was “kicked upstairs” to become Army Chief of Staff, while his deputy, GEN Creighton Abrams, replaced him.⁷⁵

General Abrams’ understanding of the war was clearly different from his predecessor’s. After observing the war for several years he had come to accept, as written COIN doctrine elaborated, that pacification was a more appropriate strategy than search and destroy. General Abrams found many of PROVN’s recommendations to be very useful as well. He therefore

⁷² U.S. Department of the Army (1967), FM 31-16, pp. 63–69, 83–90.

⁷³ U.S. Marine Corps (1967), FMFM 8-2, p. 28; and U.S. Department of the Army (1968), FM 100-5, p. 13-5.

⁷⁴ U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, *Handbook for Military Support of Pacification*, Saigon, February 1968, p. 1.

⁷⁵ See Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999, for a positive treatment of Abrams time as COMUSMACV.

began shifting operations toward small-unit action and calling for more restraint in the use of firepower. Some credit him, along with Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and the CIA's William Colby, with the Army's shift to effective pacification. Unfortunately, this shift was undone by the 1972 and 1975 conventional offensives of the NVA.⁷⁶

Closer inspection of what actually took place after Tet reveals a much more mixed record of change. Even a commander as well respected as General Abrams was unable to shift strategy easily. General Abrams bemoaned the inability of various subordinates, including battalion and division commanders, to change their conception of the war and thus the actual conduct of operations.⁷⁷ Battles like Khe Sanh and Hue, in which the enemy stood and fought rather than running, appeared to validate the conventional warfare approach. Despite General Abrams' top-down efforts to change Army doctrine, "unofficially, attrition remained in force."⁷⁸

LTG Julian Ewell's career under GEN Abrams is a good example of the limits of change. General Ewell commanded the 9th Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta in 1968 and 1969, where his obsession with body counts and kill ratios earned him the nickname "Delta Butcher." Writing after the war in an Army official publication, he defended search and destroy:

When one first observes the fighting in Vietnam, there is a tendency to assume that the current tactics are about right and that previous tactics were rather uninspired if not wrong. The first conclusion is probably correct, the second is probably wrong. For example, one hears much criticism of the Search and Destroy Operations which were extensively used in 1967 and before. However, if one looks at the situation then existing and what was actually done, the tactics were pretty well chosen and did the job. Any reasonably effective commander, after observing the enemy operate a while, can cope with him reasonably well.⁷⁹

Elsewhere in the same publication, he derides pacification via development.⁸⁰

One would not expect an officer advocating such an approach to prosper if strategy actually changed significantly under General Abrams. Yet General Ewell was promoted to command II Field Force, an Army corps command, where he continued to serve under General Abrams in 1969 and 1970. He subsequently served as a military adviser at the peace talks in Paris. Whatever General Abrams himself may have believed about COIN, much of the rest of the Army continued to pursue more or less the same type of operations it had under-

⁷⁶ Sorley (1999). See also Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Vietcong*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997; and William Colby, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen Year Involvement in Vietnam*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989.

⁷⁷ For evidence of General Abrams' frustration with his subordinates' attitudes toward his "better war," see Lewis Sorley, ed., *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes 1968–1972*, Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech University Press, 2004, pp. 116–117, 212–213, 285–286. For the opinion that General Abrams was unable to effect change, see Krepinevich (1986), pp. 252–257; Cincinnatus [Cecil Currey], *Self-Destruction, the Disintegration and Decay of the United States Army During the Vietnam Era*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1981, p. 125; and Jenkins (1970).

⁷⁸ Robert J. Graham, "Vietnam: An Infantryman's View of Our Failure," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 3, July, 1984, p. 135. Graham was an infantry sergeant in the 4th Infantry Division in 1969 and 1970. In some ways, the firepower element was actually emphasized *more* during this period as the number of ground forces declined. The term "mad minute," which described a unit firing all available weapons at unseen targets, was used frequently during General Abrams' tenure as COMUSMACV.

⁷⁹ Julian Ewell and Ira Hunt, *Sharpening the Combat Edge: The Use of Analysis to Reinforce Military Judgment*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1974, p. 78.

⁸⁰ Ewell and Hunt (1974), p. 160

taken under General Westmoreland, and continued to reward those who performed these operations well.

Interlude: COIN and the Military, 1973 to 2003

The end of significant U.S. involvement in Vietnam also marked the end of significant U.S. interest in COIN for nearly a decade. The U.S. Army refocused on conventional high-intensity war in Europe and rebuilt itself into a well-trained, all-volunteer force. Doctrine, written by GEN William Depuy and his acolytes at the new Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), was all but exclusively focused on defeating the Warsaw Pact signatories. The 1976 version of FM 100-5 is pure Central Front (except for a chapter that discusses the environmental effects of deserts and jungles). The 1982 version presents a somewhat different view of operations, but they are nonetheless focused on the same enemy in the same theater.

The Marine Corps also began to turn away from COIN, though to a lesser extent. It first sought a greater role in the European theater on the so-called Northern Flank of Norway. It subsequently embraced the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) concept designed to intervene in and protect the Persian Gulf area from Soviet depredations. COIN did not vanish entirely; the Marine Corps published a revised version of FM 8-2 in 1980 and included discussion of low-intensity conflict in its new capstone doctrinal manual, simply titled *Warfighting*.

The Reagan administration's concern about insurgency in Central America in the 1980s led to a limited resurgence of interest in COIN. A new position in DoD, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, was established by Congress in 1986 to provide additional support and guidance on low-intensity operations, including COIN.

One of the primary goals of low-intensity conflict in the 1980s was to help the government of El Salvador defeat the insurgents of the Frente Faribundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN). Yet the involvement of the U.S. military was strictly limited to a military advisory group of officially no more than 55 personnel (though this limit was circumvented to some degree).⁸¹ Furthermore, many of these advisers, who came from the special operations community, had relatively little interaction with the broader U.S. military. Most of the military remained much more concerned with NATO or RDF contingencies.

Nonetheless, resurgent interest in COIN and growing concern about international terrorism did affect doctrine. In 1986 the Army updated another COIN manual, FM 100-20, renaming it Field Circular (FC) 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict*. This document covered COIN, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping operations. In 1990 FC 100-20 was updated and redesignated FM 100-20.

The end of the Cold War was rapidly followed by the end of both the FMLN insurgency and the limited COIN renaissance. The U.S. military continued to be involved in various peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations in the 1990s and continued to produce doctrine for these operations. FM 100-20 was redesignated FM 3-7 and renamed *Stability and Support Operations*.

⁸¹ For example, according to some who participated, through the use of repeated temporary duty deployments, personnel not officially detailed to the advisory group spent significant and often nearly continuous time in El Salvador. In addition, this limit did not directly apply to non-military personnel such as those from the intelligence community.

With the attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. concern about low-intensity conflict increased dramatically once again. The rapid assault on Afghanistan resulted in the quick ouster of the Taliban government but left nothing in its place. A new government was formed, but it faced an essentially lawless country filled with terrorists, warlords, and narcotraffickers. Yet even as the military and some civilian agencies sought to grapple with this problem, planning for the invasion of Iraq began.

The invasion of Iraq and ouster of President Saddam Hussein in 2003 went as well as the ouster of the Taliban, yet it again left the United States with a lawless and ungoverned country. Within only a few months a Sunni Arab insurgency emerged, though it was not officially identified as such at that time. The U.S. military was about to engage once again in large-scale COIN operations.

COIN Doctrine, 2003 to 2005

A new edition of FM 3-7 was actually released in February 2003, one month before the beginning of OIF. This edition (over 200 pages long) is not specifically and exclusively about COIN, but it contains many familiar elements from previous COIN doctrine. It uses the term “foreign internal defense” (FID) rather than COIN in many instances, but nonetheless devotes an entire chapter to COIN. In discussing stability operations generally, it makes the following comment on intelligence:

Stability operations and support operations demand greater attention to civil considerations—the political, social, economic, and cultural factors in an area of operations (AO)—than do the more conventional offensive and defensive operations. Commanders must expand intelligence preparation of the battlefield beyond geographical and force capability considerations. The centers of gravity frequently are not military forces or terrain but may be restoring basic services or influencing public support. Cultural information is critical to gauge the potential reactions to the operation, to avoid misunderstandings, and to improve the effectiveness of the operation. Changes in the behavior of the populace may suggest a needed change in tactics or even strategy. Biographic information and leadership analysis are key to understanding adversaries or potential adversaries, their methods of operation, and how they interact with the environment. Knowledge of the ethnic and religious factions in the AO and the historical background of the contingency underlying the deployment are vital to mission success . . .⁸²

This edition also stresses the importance of the population and of coordination between civilian and military efforts.⁸³ The chapter devoted to FID presents the following summary of COIN:

Success in counterinsurgency goes to the party that achieves the greater popular support. The winner will be the party that better forms the issues, mobilizes groups and forces around them, and develops programs that solve problems of relative deprivation. This requires political, social, and economic development. Security operations by military and

⁸² U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-07, *Stability and Support Operations*, February 2003, p. 2-3.

⁸³ U.S. Department of the Army (2003), FM 3-07, p. 2-15.

police forces, combined with effective and legitimate administration of justice, provide the necessary secure environment in which development can occur.⁸⁴

The chapter then discusses the need for amnesty programs, the importance of police and paramilitaries, the need to avoid using excessive force, and the need to remain on the strategic defensive (but tactical offensive) in COIN.⁸⁵ Though comparatively brief, the same basic discussions found in earlier Army COIN doctrine are present. The manual also contains appendices on making interagency coordination work (Appendix A) and the nature of insurgency (Appendix D).

Thus, the U.S. military that entered Iraq in 2003 did not lack at least general doctrinal guidelines for COIN. However, the 2003 version of FM 3-7 was not ideal. It covered such a broad range of operations that it did not provide sufficient detail on COIN. It was further limited by its assumption that U.S. forces would typically provide advice and support rather than conduct combat operations themselves.

By the end of 2003, the U.S. military realized that it needed a new doctrine manual more specific to COIN. The result, released in October of 2004, was the Army's Field Manual—Interim (FMI) 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*. FMI 3-07.22 elaborated on previous concepts (such as the importance of insurgencies that attempted to form a “counterstate” to replace the existing authority) but basically retained the same definitions and prescriptions for COIN. In discussing why insurgency happens and why the population is important, the manual notes that

[t]he desire to form a counterstate grows from the same causes that galvanize any political campaign. These causes can range from the desire for greater equity in the distribution of resources (poverty alone is rarely, if ever, sufficient to sustain an insurgency) to a demand that foreign occupation end. Increasingly, religious ideology has become a catalyst for insurgent movements. The support of the people, then, is the center of gravity. It must be gained in whatever proportion is necessary to sustain the insurgent movement (or, contrariwise, to defeat it).⁸⁶

FMI 3-07.22 repeatedly asserts that the population is the center of gravity in COIN. Additionally, it argues that intelligence must cover cultural, social, political, and economic issues.⁸⁷ The importance of civil-military coordination is similarly emphasized.⁸⁸

In discussing COIN combat operations, the FMI reprises familiar points from previous doctrine. One example is the possible negative consequences of firepower:

The American way of war has been to substitute firepower for manpower. As a result, US forces have frequently resorted to firepower in the form of artillery or air any time they make contact. This creates two negatives in a counterinsurgency. First, massive firepower causes collateral damage, thereby frequently driving the locals into the arms of the insur-

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of the Army (2003), FM 3-07, p. 3-4.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of the Army (2003), FM 3-07, pp. 3-4–3-7.

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual—Interim 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, October 2004, p. 1-3.

⁸⁷ U.S. Department of the Army (2004), FMI 3-07.22, pp. 4-2–4-5.

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of the Army (2004), FMI 3-07.22, pp. 2-10–2-13.

gents. Second, it allows insurgents to break contact after having inflicted casualties on friendly forces.⁸⁹

Other examples include the need for small-unit decentralized operations and the importance of patrolling out among the populace.⁹⁰ The FMI also has a section that discusses the importance of “clear and hold” operations (during which insurgents are driven from an area that is subsequently secured and developed); these are essentially pacification operations.⁹¹

COIN Operations, 2003 to 2005

In terms of COIN in Iraq, one of the first observations, made in many other places, is that civil-military coordination was woefully inadequate at first (at least at the top of each hierarchy).⁹² While the civil-military relationship appears to have improved under subsequent senior leaders, the actual command arrangements do not appear to have changed, making the relationship highly dependent on individual personalities. This is certainly not what is envisioned in doctrine.

The U.S. military’s actual conduct of COIN in Iraq from 2003 to 2005 can charitably be described as highly variable. The military used an array of approaches ranging from firepower-intensive raids to population security. This variation seems to have depended partly on understandable differences, such as the region and time period, but mostly appears to be due to different commanders. Some commanders heavily emphasized the security and development approach called for by doctrine. Others “increased kinetic activity,” a euphemism for employing firepower and raids.

Two operations from November 2005 demonstrate the U.S. military’s tendency to disregard COIN doctrine. Operation Kennesaw Dragon, launched on November 14, 2005, involved Iraqi Army units, which cordoned the town of Ad Dawr, and the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team, which air assaulted to the outskirts of the town. After a one-day sweep that encountered little resistance, the units returned to Forward Operating Base Wilson. Operation Clean Sweep, which occurred nearly simultaneously in southern Baghdad, was similar to Kennesaw Dragon, lacking only the air-assault element.⁹³ Neither operation provided any enduring security to the population or did much to garner its support. Indeed, the area covered by Clean Sweep had been “swept” only a month before, yet continued to be problematic.

Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I), aware of this ongoing failure to understand COIN, opened a “COIN Academy” in response. The MNF-I Counterinsurgency Center for Excel-

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of the Army (2004), FMI 3-07.22, p. 3-10.

⁹⁰ U.S. Department of the Army (2004), FMI 3-07.22, p. 3-9.

⁹¹ U.S. Department of the Army (2004), FMI 3-07.22, pp. 3-11–3-14.

⁹² See George Packer, *The Assassin’s Gate: America in Iraq*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005, pp. 304–305, 324–327.

⁹³ Both operations are described in “Iraqi, Coalition Forces Catch Suspects with Munitions,” American Forces Press Service, Washington, D.C., November 17, 2005.

lence at Camp Taji aimed to ensure that all commanders fully absorbed COIN doctrine. Attendance was compulsory for all officers going to command in Iraq.⁹⁴

In addition to training and education, the academy produced a guide similar to MACV's *Handbook for Military Support of Pacification*. The MNF-I *Counterinsurgency Handbook* provides a significant amount cultural and historical context for Iraq and explains why this knowledge is important for COIN operations.⁹⁵ It also provides a brief discussion of both COIN and FID, particularly noting the importance of avoiding purely "kinetic" operations focused just on killing insurgents.⁹⁶ It also devotes an entire chapter to intelligence in COIN, reiterating the importance of concepts like "every soldier [is] an intelligence collector."⁹⁷ Finally, it notes the vital importance of the population, civil-military operations, and coordination.⁹⁸

Doctrines and Operations in 2006

Despite the opening of the Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, operations in Iraq still showed wide variation in acceptance of doctrine. In March 2006, for example, the U.S. Army's 101st Division launched Operation Swarmer near Samarra. This operation, conducted jointly with substantial numbers of Iraqi troops, was described as the largest air-assault operation since the initial phases of OIF. Though touted by many as a success, Operation Swarmer appears to have been a brief sweep through an area that offered little resistance. U.S. and Iraqi forces departed after rounding up suspected insurgents and some weapons caches.⁹⁹

Even a cursory look suggests that Operation Swarmer was not doctrinal COIN, and that it did little to improve the security situation around Samarra.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Operation Swarmer was not unique; it was only the largest and most notable of this type of sweep operation. An MNF-I spokesman noted at a subsequent press briefing that operations like Swarmer "continue all across Iraq. This happened to be a brigade-level operation in the Salahuddin Province . . ."¹⁰¹

Elsewhere in Iraq, other efforts were much more doctrinally grounded. In western al-Anbar, Marines from 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, and their successors in 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, moved from a central battalion base to many smaller bases among

⁹⁴ Thomas Ricks, "U.S. Counterinsurgency Academy Giving Officers a New Mind-Set," *Washington Post*, February 21, 2006.

⁹⁵ Multi-National Force–Iraq, *Counterinsurgency Handbook*, 1st ed., Camp Taji, Iraq: Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence, May 2006b.

⁹⁶ Multi-National Force–Iraq (2006b), pp. 20–29, 59–63.

⁹⁷ Multi-National Force–Iraq (2006b), pp. 38–52.

⁹⁸ Multi-National Force–Iraq (2006b), pp. 64–70.

⁹⁹ Brian Bennett and Al Jallam, "How Operation Swarmer Fizzled," *Time*, March 17, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ For subsequent examples of continuing insecurity around Samarra, see Multi-National Corps–Iraq, Public Affairs Office, "Coalition Forces Discover Sizable Caches South of Samarra," Release No. 20061226-22, Samarra, Iraq, December 26, 2006d; and Multi-National Corps–Iraq, Public Affairs Office, "Iraqi Police Find Bomb Near Golden Mosque in Samarra," Release No. 20061212-11, Samarra, Iraq, December 12, 2006c.

¹⁰¹ Multi-National Force–Iraq, "Weekly Press Briefing, March 23," March 22, 2006a.

the population. The resulting increase in the security of the population allowed for a build up of Iraqi police and greatly reduced insurgent activity in the area around Al Qaim.¹⁰²

Though the exact approaches used in Al Qaim and Tal Afar may not be easily replicable elsewhere, doctrinally similar ones can be successful even in the most dangerous areas. Marines from the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, were able to secure a section of Ramadi, one of the most violent cities in Iraq, using techniques such as intensive patrolling, supporting Iraqi police, and taking a census of neighborhood residents.¹⁰³ Notably, these techniques continue to be practiced by the Iraqi Army unit that operated with the U.S. Marines, even though the 8th Marines rotated back to the United States in late September 2006.¹⁰⁴

Even as COIN operations continued in Iraq, new doctrine was produced. In June 2006, the Army and Marine Corps issued the final draft of a new joint manual, FM 3-24/FMFM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. This draft shows more nuance in definitions and descriptions than previous manuals, in part because it incorporates significant input from academics.¹⁰⁵ Yet the basic substance remains similar. In defining the objective of COIN, the joint manual states that

[t]he primary objective of any counterinsurgent is to foster the development of effective governance by a legitimate government. All governments rule through a combination of consent and coercion. Governments described as “legitimate” rule primarily with the consent of the governed, while those described as “illegitimate” tend to rely mainly or entirely on coercion.¹⁰⁶

The manual also devotes a chapter to the importance of civil-military integration, highlighting in particular the need for unity of command and unity of effort:

For all elements of the U.S. government engaged in a particular COIN mission, formal command and control using established command relationships within a clear hierarchy should be axiomatic. Unity of command should also extend to all military forces supporting a host nation. The ultimate objective of these arrangements is for local military forces, police, and other security forces to establish effective command and control while attaining a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within the society . . . All elements supporting the COIN should strive for maximum unity of effort. Given the primacy of political considerations, military forces often support civilian efforts.¹⁰⁷

The draft provides several examples of mechanisms for civil-military coordination, including Joint Interagency Coordination Groups, host-nation Country Teams, and Civil-Military

¹⁰²Charles Crain, “Counterinsurgency Strategy: Staying Put,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 2006.

¹⁰³Multi-National Corps–Iraq, “On Patrol with Marines in Ramadi,” Ramadi, Iraq, July 22, 2006a.

¹⁰⁴Multi-National Corps–Iraq, “Iraqi Army Conducts Census, Security Operations,” Ar Ramadi, Iraq, November 26, 2006b.

¹⁰⁵See Eliot Cohen, Conrad Crane, Jan Horvath, and John Nagl, “Principles, Imperatives, and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review*, Vol. 86, No. 2, March/April 2006.

¹⁰⁶U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps, Field Manual 3-24/Fleet Marine Force Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, final draft, June 2006a.

¹⁰⁷U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps (2006a), FM 3-24/FMFM 3-24, pp. 2-2–2-3.

Operations Centers. It also notes two models employed in the field, the Provincial Reconstruction Team pioneered in Afghanistan and CORDS in Vietnam.¹⁰⁸

The importance of intelligence is also highlighted in the draft in both a chapter and a more-detailed appendix. The manual notes that COIN

is an intelligence war. The function of intelligence in COIN is to facilitate understanding of the operational environment, with emphasis on the populace, host nation, and insurgents, so commanders can best address the issues driving the insurgency. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents require an effective intelligence capability to be successful. They attempt to create and maintain intelligence networks while trying to neutralize their opponent's intelligence capabilities.¹⁰⁹

The Marine Corps also developed two other complementary manuals: *A Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats* and Marine Corps Interim Publication (MCIP) 3-33.01, *Small Unit Leader's Guide to Counterinsurgency*. The *Tentative Manual* is focused at the battalion and above level of leadership and MCIP 3-33.01 at the company level and below. The *Tentative Manual*, as its title suggests, is intended as much to provoke debate as to provide extensive guidance.¹¹⁰

In contrast, MCIP 3-33.01 includes a substantial amount of TTP information along with doctrine. Its focus is heavily on small-unit patrolling; it devotes more than 40 pages (out of 239) to the subject, and includes two patrolling-related appendixes. It also bluntly argues that security of the population must be paramount: "If you fail to secure the people, you will fail in COIN."¹¹¹ It further argues that securing the population requires living among the people:

One of the most effective ways to protect and establish relations with the people is to move in and live among them. The increase in COIN operations in the urban environment and the critical need to maintain contact and provide security for the local populace has driven us to conduct near continuous operations—primarily patrolling—at the rifle company level. In order to make this tactically feasible, rifle companies should normally establish a "firm base" (FB) inside of or in the immediate vicinity of the urban area where the patrols will operate.¹¹²

While MCIP 3-33.01 may be somewhat lengthy and too focused on TTP, as some in the Marine Corps have privately argued, it is nonetheless valuable as a clear guide for the kind of decentralized small-unit operations that have been at the heart of U.S. COIN doctrine for decades.

The final doctrinal development of 2006 was the December release of the official version of FM 3-24; the Marine Corps official designation was changed to Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5. It is substantially similar to the June 2006 draft; indeed,

¹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps (2006a), FM 3-24/FMFM 3-24, pp. 2-9–2-13

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps (2006a), FM 3-24/FMFM 3-24, p. 3-1.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats*, Quantico, Va., June 7, 2006, p. i-ii.

¹¹¹ U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Information Publication 3-33.01, *Small Unit Leader's Guide to Counterinsurgency*, June 2006, p. 73.

¹¹² U.S. Marine Corps (2006), p. 74.

the only major change appears to be the incorporation of an appendix on intelligence into the main body of the text.¹¹³ Like the draft manual, it emphasizes the importance of intelligence, civil-military operations, population security, and legitimate government.

Getting It Right? COIN in Iraq, 2007

After a near-disastrous 2006 that saw rising violence in most of Iraq, 2007 saw improvement in the security environment, most strikingly in al-Anbar province but also in Baghdad. Some credit changes in military practice related to the new COIN doctrine with this improvement, along with an increase in troop numbers. While a detailed assessment of the situation is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the central improvements in security have resulted from fractures between insurgent groups rather than a major change in U.S. operations.

As late as November 2006, Marine intelligence painted a grim picture of al-Anbar despite the doctrinally sound efforts in places like Al Qaim and Ramadi.¹¹⁴ However, many tribes were in the process of splitting from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and realigning with the United States (and to a lesser extent the central government of Iraq). While the United States proved flexible in exploiting some of these fractures, U.S. successes occurred independently of doctrinal change. Furthermore, these maneuvers have not resulted in conditions amenable to long-term stability under a unified government. Instead, various tribes and factions jockey for power even as AQI lurks in the hinterland.¹¹⁵ Elsewhere, success is mixed or absent. In and around Baqubah, north of Baghdad, AQI and Shia militias such as Jaysh al-Mahdi battle to dominate the population.

Some operational shifts have taken place. Many smaller bases have been opened, particularly in al-Anbar and in Baghdad. Partnering with Iraqi security appears to be taken much more seriously. Yet wide variation in U.S. military unit attitudes toward Iraqis (both in uniform and out) persists, and disagreements about COIN are still obvious at senior levels. Sometimes these disagreements have serious consequences in terms of operations undertaken or foregone.¹¹⁶

Komer's Lament: COIN Doctrine vs. COIN Practice

The preceding discussion presents the paradox alluded to earlier: If COIN doctrine has always been written one way, emphasizing elements such as population security and intelligence, why does U.S. military practice seem to vary so widely, and often proceed in direct opposition to written doctrine? Robert Komer's 1972 diagnosis was that institutions, military and civilian,

¹¹³ Compare U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps (2006a), FM 3-24/FMF 3-24, Chapter 3 and Appendix B, to U.S. Department of the Army and U.S. Marine Corps, Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency*, December 16, 2006b, Chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ Dafna Linzer and Thomas Ricks, "Anbar Picture Grows Clearer, and Bleaker," *Washington Post*, November 28, 2006.

¹¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the shifts in tribal alignment in al-Anbar, see Austin Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival*, Vol. 50, No. 2, April/May 2008.

¹¹⁶ This assessment is based in large part on author's personal observations and conversations with military personnel in Iraq from August 2007 to January 2008.

“do their thing”; because no U.S. organization’s “institutional repertoire” is focused on the politico-military niche of COIN, all responses fail. In particular, Komer notes the following:

Equally striking is the sharp discontinuity between the mixed counterinsurgency strategy which U.S. and GVN policy called for from the outset, and the overwhelmingly conventional and militarized nature of our actual response. The impact of institutional constraints is nowhere more evident than in the GVN and U.S. approach to Vietnam’s military aspects, both before and after 1965. . . . The institutional background of U.S. and GVN military leaders helped shape the nature of that response.¹¹⁷

The essence of this argument is that a force that is structured to fight a high-intensity conflict against another nation-state’s military is ill-equipped to adapt to the challenge of COIN. It is not just physically ill equipped but, much more importantly, mentally ill equipped.

This is not an indictment of the intellectual capabilities of the military. Professional military officers are rarely stupid, particularly in the highly competitive ranks of the U.S. military. Rather, it is an argument that successful organizations such as the U.S. military develop structures, philosophy, and preferences, together referred to as “organizational culture,” to help them carry out their tasks. By virtue of long years of training and education, officers are inculcated with patterns of thinking that reflect this culture. In the case of the U.S. military, these patterns are both incredibly useful in high-intensity conflict (the mission of most of the military) and incredibly inappropriate in COIN.

A number of these patterns of thinking affect COIN practice. One is the search for decisive battle, which necessarily drives forces to seek large battles and thus leads to operations like Junction City and Swamer. Another is the drive to maximize use of available firepower. The understandable desire to protect and provide comfort to their units encourages officers to (1) adopt force protection measures that limit effectiveness and (2) create large, comfortable bases away from the population. These patterns are so deeply inculcated that officers seldom recognize them, much less correct them.

The contrast between the U.S. Army of 1898 and the U.S. Army of 2003 is instructive on this point. The Army of 1898, with its problematic organization and still-nascent professional education system, was fairly poor at conventional warfare. (Fortunately, Spain was not in a position to take advantage of this deficiency.) However, it did reasonably well in the Philippines in providing local security, governance, and development. The vastly more professional Army of 2003 has had the opposite problem; though capable of rapidly defeating large conventional armies, it has experienced problems in adjusting to COIN. While this comparison should not be overdrawn, since the two COIN campaigns are vastly different, the point is that certain patterns of thinking that are useful for conventional warfare can be both counterproductive in COIN and difficult to change.

If these patterns of thinking are so common, then, why is there variation in COIN practice? A partial explanation is that organizational culture, while pervasive, is not absolute. Some officers have the capacity and drive to become both warriors and scholars. Yet one cannot rely on attracting officers who have the drive, discipline, and intellectual curiosity to become both superlative officers and academics. Such individuals are to be treasured when found precisely because they will be rare. Instead, creating a large number of officers who are good at

¹¹⁷ Komer (1972), pp. vi–vii, 37–59.

COIN will require a complete revamping of the U.S. military, particularly its training and education.

Some argue that this transformation is already under way, and that new COIN doctrine is prime evidence. Officers at the Command and General Staff College talk incessantly about COIN, and the National Training Center has been restructured to reflect a COIN-like environment. In a few years, the U.S. military may indeed have fully adapted to COIN.

Even if this hypothesized transformation is taking place (which remains debatable), another question arises: Having adapted to COIN, will the U.S. military still be good at high-intensity warfare? Seamless mastery of the full spectrum of operations is the desired end state. However, no military has been able to achieve this goal. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was once known for its mastery of mobile warfare, but this mastery has not served the IDF well in the past 25 years, which have been dominated by low-intensity conflict in Lebanon and the occupied territories. The IDF has produced some technical responses to the problem, and has adapted some of its operations, but it still has not mastered the challenge. Moreover, the recent brief war with Hizbollah even suggests that the IDF's proficiency in mobile warfare may have eroded, as soldiers are now far more accustomed to long days guarding checkpoints than to the fast-paced nature of high-intensity conflict. Rather than moving from mastery of one end of the spectrum of conflict to mastery of the full spectrum of operations, the IDF may have become a master of none.

Of course, one should not draw too many conclusions from a single case. But similar worries are already surfacing in the United States.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, the erosion of U.S. high-intensity warfare capabilities may not matter, since the United States is unlikely to face a serious competitor at the high end of land conflict in the near term. Yet it bears considering as DoD tries to make irregular warfare a priority coequal with conventional war.

Furthermore, even if some change does take place in the culture of the junior and even field-grade components of the officer corps, it is unclear that this shift will be maintained after OIF. As previously noted, the U.S. Army radically reoriented toward conventional war in Europe after the Vietnam War. While conventional war in Europe seems unlikely, conventional wars in both the Middle East and the Korean peninsula are plausible alternative missions for the Army. Similarly, the Marine Corps could shift toward more rapid-deployment-style missions of limited duration.

Note that the variation in observed COIN practice in Iraq likely stems from differences in military organizations. Army Special Forces have always considered FID to be part of their core mission and have developed patterns of thinking appropriate to that mission. These patterns are often highly at odds with the larger Army. The Marine Corps falls somewhere between the Special Forces and the larger Army in terms of patterns of thinking. Of course, the Special Forces are not expected to win a high-intensity conflict alone and, despite the occasional exuberant Marine rhetoric, neither is the Marine Corps.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, the remarks of the U.S. Army's vice chief of staff, GEN Richard Cody, in David Wood, "Warfare Skills Eroding as Army Fights Insurgents," *Baltimore Sun*, October 24, 2006.

Conclusion

Written doctrine for any military task is necessary for COIN success (at least in the world of ground forces). More than mere words on a page are required, however. Organizational adaptation, including alteration of the status of branches (e.g., expanding both the number and status of military police units while decreasing the number of artillery units), is much more important than doctrine. Yet this adaptation will produce both winners and losers in the organization, and will result in both increases and decreases in organizational capacity for different activities. Until these changes and the trade-offs involved are recognized and implemented, doctrinal change will have a modest effect, at best.

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